



Health Services
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

August 2, 2016

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313 N. Figueroa Street, Suite 912
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Tel: (213) 240-8101
Fax: (213) 481-0503


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*To ensure access to high-quality,
patient-centered, cost-effective
health care to Los Angeles County
residents through direct services at
DHS facilities and through
collaboration with community and
university partners.*



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TO: Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: Hal F. Yee, Jr., M.D., Ph.D. 
Chief Medical Officer

This memo is to provide you with the requested information pertaining to Dr. Eli Johnson and the Department of Health Services' (DHS) application of the County's Veterans Preference policy as it relates to physicians applying for residency slots in our healthcare system. Specifically, Dr. Johnson provided testimony before the Board of Supervisors on May 24, 2016, and on June 1, 2016, your offices requested a full and complete review.

At my request, Harbor-UCLA Medical Center's (Harbor-UCLA) Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Timothy Van Natta, met with Dr. Johnson to fully understand his outstanding concerns. Moreover, they discussed options for addressing his concerns about ensuring that Veterans receive appropriate preference in the residency application process. As a result of their dialog, Dr. Van Natta and I jointly developed an action plan that we believe addresses his concerns, and which we have already implemented as follows:

- Drs. Van Natta, Spellberg, and Thyne have communicated to all of their medical staff at Harbor-UCLA, LAC+USC, and Olive-UCLA, respectively, the importance of giving Veterans preference in hiring processes consistent with the County's policy along with explaining precisely what is meant by "honorable discharge" for military service (i.e., as denoting good to excellent service); and
- Drs. Van Natta, Spellberg, and Thyne have specifically communicated with their Graduate Medical Education Directors, Residency Program Directors, Clinical Chairs, and Division Chiefs (i.e., all of the managers involved in resident hiring) to give Veterans preference in their residency application processes. This should include discussion and calibration of Veteran's status in their application processes, including recognition of the objective value of a veteran's training and experiences as positive competitive factors in evaluating resident applicants; and

Dr. Van Natta advised Dr. Johnson of this plan of action prior to its implementation.

Please rest assured that our physician leadership team has spent a substantial amount of time thinking about, discussing, and deliberating extensively about how best to ensure that veterans receive preference when they apply for residency and fellowship positions at DHS facilities. Moreover, we believe that the reason to do this has as much to do with acknowledging the special leadership skills, teamwork experience, and other valuable experiences and training that Veterans possess, as it has to do with the County policy.

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During our briefing to your Health Deputies, Mr. Richard Espinosa and Ms. Angela Yoon, we discussed a bifurcated approach in which we would address Dr. Johnson's concerns and later provide a systemic solution to ensuring preference be given to residency applicants that are Veterans. However, based on what we learned from Dr. Van Natta's discussions with Dr. Johnson, we instead chose to develop and implement the system-wide plan described above, which addresses Dr. Johnson's specific concerns, as well as serves as a systemic solution to ensuring Veteran's Preference Policy is incorporated and followed by our Residency Programs.

By way of background, DHS trains more physicians than any other single system in the Nation, except for the VA and Kaiser. We manage ~150 separate residency and fellowship programs (for physician trainees) based at three remote sites affiliated with two independent medical schools that train physicians in ~50 different specialties that have different requirements. Hence, there are ~150 different program directors and ~150 different application processes for the ~150 different programs. We believe that the steps that we have taken represent an effective and efficient mechanism for assuring that preference is given to Veterans applying to ALL of our residency programs in this very complex and large system.

Thank you for bringing this important matter to our attention, and for having allowed our Department the opportunity to address this issue. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (213) 240-8101.

HFY:gp

c: Ruth Wong, Director of Military and Veterans Affairs